



**Homeland
Security**

Press Release

December 10, 2003

FIVE INDIVIDUALS CHARGED WITH FEDERAL NARCOTICS (KHAT) VIOLATIONS

Washington, D.C. - United States Attorney Kenneth L. Wainstein and Allan Doody, Special Agent in Charge of the Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE), Washington Field Office, announced today the arraignment of five individuals on a five-count indictment that charges them with Conspiracy to Import Cathinone and Cathine, both also known as Khat, Conspiracy to Import Cathinone and Cathine, Importation of Cathinone and Cathine, Importation of Cathinone and Cathine, Distribution and Possession of Cathinone and Cathine for the Purpose of Unlawful Importation, Conspiracy to Distribute and Possess with Intent to Distribute Cathinone and Cathine, Unlawful Possession with Intent to Distribute Cathinone and Cathine, between August and November 2004.

If convicted, the defendants, who were arraigned yesterday in federal court, face a maximum sentence of twenty years of imprisonment on each of the five counts. The case has been assigned to the Honorable Ricardo M. Urbina.

The indictment, which was returned by a federal grand jury on November 23, 2004, charges that the alleged leaders of the conspiracy, Samuel Tesfaye, 33, of Greenbelt, Maryland, and Wondesen Mamo, 46, of Washington, D.C., along with Bedilu Gioireta, 22, of Ethiopia, Africa, Mohammed Ali Al-Masry, 37, and Abdul-Malik Al-Masry, 46, both of Yemen, supplied large quantities of Khat to wholesale dealers throughout the District of Columbia, the State of Maryland and the Commonwealth of Virginia.

The Khat was imported by ship from Ethiopia to Baltimore, Maryland, bound to a fictitious address for Samuel Tesfaye.

On October 19, 2004, ICE Agents of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement contacted Officers of Customs and Border Protection in order to facilitate searching the container. The container was searched and Khat was discovered in approximately 41 boxes, totaling approximately 2500 pounds. Later, ICE agents seized an additional 100 pounds of Khat and approximately \$15,000.00 from this narcotics organization. The Khat appeared to be freeze dried.

The Khat was tested using a spectrometer. A detectable amount of Cathinone was present in the Khat. Cathinone is an active ingredient of Khat, a plant which is chewed or brewed in tea to produce a stimulant effect similar to amphetamines. Khat (*Catha edulis*) is a flowering shrub native to northeast Africa and the Arabian Peninsula; the plant usually grows from 2 to 12 feet high,

but can sometimes grow as high as 20 feet. Khat shrubs are often grown interspersed between coffee trees.

Fresh Khat leaves contain psychoactive ingredients, which is structurally and chemically similar to d-amphetamine; thus Cathinone is a Schedule I drug under the Controlled Substances Act. However, if the fresh leaves are not refrigerated, they begin to deteriorate and the chemical composition of the plant breaks down, leaving the chemical Cathine, a milder form of Cathinone, which is a Schedule IV drug. Khat is typically ingested by chewing the young buds or flowering leaves, as is done with loose tobacco.

Khat produces feelings of excitement and increased motor activity in the person ingesting it, specifically, feelings of exaltation or euphoria, of being liberated from space and time, extreme loquacity, inane laughing, and eventually a semi-coma or deep sleep. Used chronically, it can lead to a form of delirium. Use of Khat also increases the respiratory and pulse rates of the user, Page 3 and tends to increase blood pressure and decrease the functional capacity of the cardiovascular system.

Khat is usually packaged in plastic bags or wrapped in banana leaves (and sometimes sprinkled with water) to retain its moisture and freshness, and thus its potency. It is commonly sold in restaurants, bars, grocery stores, and smoke shops, and generally shipped to the U.S. on Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays for weekend use. Khat, with the active ingredient of Cathinone, is generally sold for personal use in 6-gram ziplock baggies for \$25.00 at resale.

The wholesale price for Khat with the active ingredient of Cathinone is sold at approximately \$120.00 per kilogram. ICE agents in this case seized approximately 2500 pounds, which amounts to 1136 kilograms with a wholesale price of approximately \$136,320.00 and a street value of approximately \$4.7 million.

In announcing the indictment and arraignment, United States Attorney Wainstein and Allan Doody praised the efforts of ICE Group Supervisor Fred Stacey, ICE Special Agents Jesse Williams and Noel Arciaga. They also praised the efforts of the following U.S.

Attorney's Office support personnel: paralegals Cherell Gerald- Lonon, Legal Assistant Brenda Payne, Assistant United States Attorneys Tricia Francis, Barry Wiegand and Maria Lerner who assisted with the investigation of this case and Martin Dee Carpenter, who will be prosecuting the case at trial.

An indictment is merely a formal charge that a defendant has committed a violation of criminal laws. Every defendant is presumed innocent until and unless found guilty.

#ICE#

*U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is the largest investigative arm
of the Department of Homeland Security*